

Program Utilizes Strategic Approaches to Improve Community Health

Issue

Imagine living in an area of South Carolina where poor health is so prevalent, you don't even know what types of prevention efforts to concentrate on first. According to 2004 data, in Orangeburg County alone, heart disease, cancer, and stroke were the first, second, and third leading causes of death respectively. Orangeburg County data from the 2004 S.C. Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) paints a vivid picture for risk factors that contribute to an increased risk of developing a chronic condition:

- 25% of county residents are current smokers;
- 23% of county residents lead a sedentary lifestyle;
- 68% of county residents are overweight or obese; and
- 36% of county residents have high cholesterol.

Intervention

The S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control's (DHEC) Region 5 staff were recently trained for Mobilizing for Action through Planning and Partnerships (MAPP). This strategic approach to community health improvement helps communities prioritize public health issues, identify resources and prepares them to take action. MAPP was used to survey over 1,000 individuals to learn more about community health concerns. Residents identified high blood pressure as the top health concern affecting the quality of life in the community. Chronic disease prevention and treatment, aging issues, problems with access to care, and concerns about health leadership and health disparities also ranked high.

With the support of Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant dollars, DHEC Region 5 combined forces with South Carolina State University, Claflin University, Family Health Center and the Regional Medical Center to address the community's health concerns. A Wellness Celebration was held at the Orangeburg Mall to centralize access and reach a wide variety of citizens, and offered the following:

- A variety of health services were provided, including free blood pressure screenings, blood glucose testing, cholesterol checks, education and resources; and
- Interactive physical activity demonstrations, cooking lessons, taste testing, and many displays and mini-presentations on tobacco cessation, eating healthy, health insurance and local health programs were available.

Impact

Now this event has four years of success and is held the last Saturday in August of each year. The mayor has recognized the last Saturday in August as Wellness Day in Orangeburg County. Partners continue to work together to improve:

- Communication and collaboration between local agencies, health care providers and universities to support community health activities;
- Partnerships with local schools to promote physical activity, including exercise instruction, building walking trails at selected schools and conducting after-school programs focused on nutrition and exercise; and
- Heart-healthy and diabetes prevention training to community partners to promote nutrition and physical activity. These educational programs will help address chronic conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, heart disease and cancer.

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